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SUBJECT: INTERNAL SQUABBLES THREATEN NIGERIA'S MAIN  
OPPOSITION PARTY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B & D).

**1. (C) SUMMARY:** The ANPP, Nigeria's leading opposition party, issued a series of competing suspensions of senior leaders from the party last week in an replay of a theme all too common in Nigerian politics. For now, however, the suspensions have been lifted by the competing factions pending reconciliation meetings likely to occur in the next week. The main players included ANPP Chairman Don Etiebet, ANPP presidential aspirant John Nwodo, Sokoto Governor Bafarawa, and ANPP 2004 (and possibly 2007) presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari, with possible behind-the-scenes appearances by President Obasanjo, VP Atiku and former president Babangida. While the internal struggle could severely cripple the ANPP, it should have no effect on Buhari's election tribunal challenge to the 2003 election currently wending its way through Nigeria's legal system. It does, however, highlight the dominance of money politics and the ruling PDP's activities in other parties. END SUMMARY.

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CAST FOR THIS (IM)MORALITY PLAY  
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**2. (C) The Main Actors:**

-- All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP) Chairman DON ETIEBET has been unseen and ineffective for some time. Complaints about his inactivity have continued during his tenure as party chairman. His support of the State of Emergency in Plateau State this year was widely viewed as a signal he had finally succumbed to legal and financial persuasion from the ruling PDP and the GON's security services. There is a precedent. Etiebet had been a major critic of military dictator Abacha's self-succession efforts until, after a two-day sojourn with the State Security Services (SSS), he appeared on television, a bit bedraggled, to claim he had "seen God" and decided that Abacha was not a bad chap. After release from a more recent detention a few months ago, the legal difficulties facing his oil business seem to have disappeared. With this apparently new-found financial security, Etiebet has grown strangely averse to agitation on behalf of the opposition.

-- ANPP Sokoto State Governor Attahiru Bafarawa views himself a rising star in northern politics, with some "northern elites" encouraging him to run for president in 2007. He views himself as leader of the ANPP governors, and organized a "Northern Governors Forum," that includes both ANPP and PDP governors. His critics in the ANPP accuse Bafarawa of undermining Buhari's suit against the 2003 election. Bafarawa's presidential aspirations may be more to position himself for a VP slot, or Senate President or a third term as Governor, but he is a canny and somewhat principled politician who normally avoids rocking the boat past an acceptable level.

-- Former Minister of Information and ANPP Presidential aspirant John Nwodo is a leading politicians from Nigeria's Southeast. He has strong ties in both the ANPP and ruling PDP, and is admired by groups throughout the nation. Since losing the nomination to Buhari in 2003, he has continued to back ANPP candidates while maintaining a low public profile. Nwodo remains an important link between north and south, especially after the assassination of leading South-South opposition politician Marshall Harry in the run-up to the 2003 elections, and will be influential in Nigerian politics over the next few years.

-- Former head of state and ANPP 2003 Presidential candidate Buhari remains one of the most popular politicians in the country. Having rallied grassroots support throughout the nation during his 2003 campaign, his stand opposing the election outcome though the courts has further improved his image throughout the country. In spite of the efforts of Obasanjo to frighten the electorate with claims of religious extremism, Buhari is still capable of drawing crowds in the north and south of Nigeria. While delays in the tribunal process have sapped some of the enthusiasm of his northern supporters, his popularity remains high and his relationship with Igbo leader Emeka Ojukwu remains good.

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STAGING  
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13. (C) In the current face-off, Etiebet is accusing Sokoto State Governor Bafarawa of engaging in "anti-party activities." Etiebet initially suspended Bafarawa from the party, reportedly accomplishing this by sharing Naira 7.2 million (about USDOLS 54,000) with many ANPP state party chairmen and executive committee members.

14. (C) In response, Sokoto ANPP Governor Bafarawa mobilized his own group of party chairmen -- with the help of the Zamfara and Kebbi state governors and, reportedly, at least Naira 20 million (about 154,000 USDOLS) of state government funds -- to suspend Etiebet. The official reason was that Etiebet had allegedly "diverted election funds" during the 2003 campaign and was cooperating with President Obasanjo on various issues. In a meeting of ANPP state party chairmen, Zamfara Governor Sani is said to have threatened Etiebet, saying, "Let's vote tomorrow and see who can bring more money to buy the chairmen."

15. (C) Both sets of suspensions have since been rolled back. ANPP officials have arranged for reconciliation meetings between the two groups, but antagonisms still remain. In addition to Etiebet's relative inaction except for supporting the President's State of Emergency declaration in Plateau State, his critics claim one of Obasanjo's advisors visited Etiebet just before he paid out the money to the ANPP chairmen. Bafarawa's critics point to Bafarawa's presidential ambitions, encouraged by members of the influential Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), and criticize him for destabilizing the party.

16. (C) Into this mix come Northern Nigeria's Kebbi and Zamfara governors. Zamfara's Sani is widely believed to be working for former head of state Babangida in an effort to guarantee him an ANPP platform for his 2007 presidential bid in the event that the ruling PDP does not nominate Babangida. He has made several visits to Babangida's hometown recently and has had a relationship with Babangida for many years. Kebbi's Aliero is believed to have made the same offer to current Vice President Atiku Abubakar, based on Atiku's many visits to Kebbi and their long personal friendship.

17. (C) In the Southeast, a caucus of ANPP leaders there met throughout last week in an attempt to either resolve the crisis or determine their own future. Their natural leader, Nwodo, has thus far refused the ANPP chairmanship, commenting to Poloff that if he took it "Nigeria would burn." While Nwodo remains hesitant, the Southeast caucus is faced with two choices: stick with Nwodo or jump from the ANPP to Ojukwu's APGA.

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DENOUEMENT  
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18. (C) There may be several more acts, but like a bad movie the possible endings seem clear in advance. Either the ANPP will put itself back together as a coherent national party, even as only a vehicle for a national campaign such as Buhari's for president in 2003, or it will join Nigeria's other opposition parties as a regional also-ran. President Obasanjo's ruling PDP would obviously benefit, as it has before. The PDP is somewhat such a vehicle and has its own divisions, although more of its own making than from efforts by outsiders. As the jockeying for support in the 2007 elections increases, it is not unthinkable that Obasanjo's estranged VP Atiku could attempt to move his supporters to the ANPP. And while Babangida is nowhere near as strong as most Nigerians believe, any move by Obasanjo to change the Constitution so as to give himself a third term could lead Babangida toward the ANPP too.

19. (C) The ANPP internal squabble could have serious implications for its continued viability, but should have no effect on the ongoing election tribunal contesting the 2003 Presidential elections. Buhari's case resumed September 14, and he has yet to take a public stand on the intra-ANPP wrangling. He is in Abuja this week and is expected to step into the fray. Interestingly, Etiebet accompanied Buhari to court on September 14, the first time Etiebet has appeared there in a while.

110. (C) COMMENT: The most troubling aspect of this affair is the continued use of money to influence party officials. Nigerians seem to tolerate the siphoning of government funds (both federal and state, and by all parties) to manipulate politics. Obasanjo's publicly declared fight against corruption, and his call for reducing the role of money in politics, seem to have had no impact on such practices within his or any other party.

CAMPBELL